

Presidential Perceptions

There is no doubt that general anesthesia for dental procedures is the practice of dentistry. This is inherent by definition and has been emphasized and reemphasized many times in recent years. Even Dental Practice Acts have been changed to specifically spell out that indeed general anesthesia constitutes a part of dental practice.

Yet, from time to time, we find responsible groups making pronouncements which would indicate that such is not the case. At least they give the impression that dentists who administer general anesthetics are not really within their right but are permitted to do these things only because of need. Whoever is of the opinion that dentists need someone else's *permission* to administer anesthetics should take a long hard look at what constitutes the traditional and legal practice of dentistry.

Recently, a Newsletter of the New York State Society of Anesthesiologists, a component of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, revealed that the New York group had passed a resolution defining the use of general anesthesia as the *practice of medicine*. It was hoped that we had heard the last of this type of thinking. While the numerically large majority of physician-anesthesiologists recognizes that dentists carefully and purposefully evaluate their patients and provide fine anesthet-

ic service as part of the practice of dentistry, there remain a few who are completely unaware of the propriety of ambulatory techniques appropriate to the practice of anesthesia in dental offices. They fail to consider that there are hundreds of thousands of general anesthetics given in dental offices each year and that the mortality rate is fantastically low. To imply that general anesthesia is not a part of the practice of dentistry is absurd.

Dentistry, at least in part, is to blame for some of the thinking that prompts these pronouncements. Dentists who forever lean on those outside our profession to do their general anesthesia for them and thereby give the real or apparent impression that general anesthesia really should not or cannot be provided by dentists themselves should weigh the wisdom of their actions. One can find even dental colleges utilizing the services of physicians to provide their general anesthetic services even though there are qualified dentists and oral surgeons on their faculties. This is unfortunate and is damaging to the profession because it creates the impression that dentistry is unable to provide from its own ranks competent anesthetists and must go outside the profession and engage non-dentists to practice our profession for us. This is a deplorable situation and warrants full consideration by the dental profession as a whole.

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